

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ASA WORLD FORCE.

THE French Revolution is the most important event in the life of modern Europe. Herder compared it to the Reformation and the rise of Christianity. It deserves to be ranked with those two great movements in history, because, like them, it destroyed many of the landmarks of the world in which generations of men had passed their lives* because it was a movement towards a completer humanity, and because it too was a religion, with its doctrines, its apostles, and its martyrs. It brought on the stage of human affairs forces which have moulded our actions ever since and have taken a permanent place among the formative influences of civilization. It stood above all for equality of opportunity, declaring each one of us, regardless of birth, colour, nationality or creed, to be possessed of inalienable rights.

As travellers and publicists of the eighteenth century fore* saw the approach of the Revolution, so historians seek its roots in the generations and indeed in the centuries which preceded it. Louis Blanc argued that no man could date its beginning, since all nations had contributed to produce it. "All the revolts of the past unite and lose themselves in it, like rivers in the sea. It is the glory of France to have performed the work of the human race at the price of her own blood/* The famous socialist commences his narrative with John Ruskin, but this is to pile a needless burden on our backs. It is enough for us to remember that the Reformation had challenged ecclesiastical authority; that the doctrine of the supremacy of conscience was extended from the sphere of religious belief to that of political action; that the growing claims of the human spirit were nourished on the doctrines of the

Law of Nature
 and the Social Contract; that the yoke of a
 dying feudalism
 and a corrupt autocracy bred increasing
 exasperation among
 nations rapidly advancing in wealth and
 education; that the
 explosion occurred in France sooner than
 elsewhere, not
 because her condition was more intolerable, but
 owing to the
 converging influence of certain political,
 financial, intellectual,
 and personal factors. It is the supreme
 achievement of Albert
 Sorel to have exhibited the Revolution, which
 had appeared
 to some observers as the subversion and to
 others as the